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Title

Special Issue: Population and Development: Comparative Anthropological Perspectives

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9259t8jv>

Journal

Studies in Comparative International Development, 50(4)

ISSN

0039-3606

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Publication Date

2015-12-01

DOI

10.1007/s12116-015-9199-x

Peer reviewed

Special Issue:
Population and Development: Comparative Anthropological Perspectives

Introduction

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The methods and approaches of anthropology make the discipline particularly well positioned to understand how populations are implicated in, and respond to, development programs. These methods and approaches include in-depth explorations of how power operates, the exposition of long-term effects of policies and programs on everyday life, the careful focus on the relationship between the values people articulate when asked directly and their actual lived practices, and the insistence on intimate research conducted over long periods of time. But anthropology's contribution to the study of comparative international development has been marginal compared to that of other social sciences such as economics, political science, and sociology. The relative dearth of anthropology articles in most issues of this journal is representative of a wider pattern in development studies publications. The explanation for anthropology's outsider status is worth considering. In part, many anthropologists who study development are highly critical of dominant paradigms, and choose not to situate their work in relation to mainstream academic discourse on the topic. Anthropologists commonly ask, for example, who determines what development even means, and we worry whether it actually benefits those in whose name it is undertaken. Indeed, much of the anthropological literature suggests that development reinforces rather than ameliorates inequalities. Anthropology's critical stance toward development may also lead its perspective to be excluded from debates where – at

least from many anthropologists' point of view – the prevailing wisdom accepts assumptions that our discipline questions. And anthropology does itself – and the populations we care about – no favors when we write about development, power, and inequality in insular jargon, excluding others who we often lament do not listen to us.

By contrast, the role of population processes in development has been a topic of extensive scholarship among demographers and is a major area of focus in many development policies, programs, and interventions (think, for example, of the huge global investments over the past 50 years in population control, family planning, and reproductive health). In many respects, however, the demographic literature and other comparative approaches to development unfold in parallel scholarly worlds. The contributions of demography to the study of development often do not intersect with scholarship in political science, economics, and other branches of sociology because demography is not central to these disciplines' theoretical debates.

Anthropology is, arguably, even more of an outsider in demography than it is in development studies, with some significant exceptions (Basu and Aaby 1998; Bledsoe and Pison 1994; Greenhalgh 1995; Kertzer and Fricke 1997; Lesthaeghe 1989). However, it is our goal to suggest the contributions that each of these disparate academic traditions can offer each other. In this special issue we bring together a group of papers that emerged from a conference at Brown University in March 2014 that focused on anthropological approaches to studying the relationship between population and development. We hope to demonstrate that anthropology has much to offer not only for demography and development studies on their own terms, but also for understanding the ways those two topics intersect with each other. The articles here expand the purview of narrowly conceived notions of population and development characterized by long-dominant concerns about overpopulation and its development implications, to include topics

such as migration, population health, and the consequences created by the very categories through which we think about problems of population and development.

In this introduction we do five things. First, we briefly review some of the contributions that anthropology has made in recent decades to the study of development. Second, we discuss the overall importance of population processes in development. Third, we provide an introduction to the field of anthropological demography. While each of these sections is necessarily brief – and, for experts in these areas, far too cursory – they are meant to situate the articles in this issue, placing them in a broad framework that suggests the contributions that anthropology can make to the study of comparative international development in general, and to the relationship between population and development in particular. To this end, the fourth aim of this introduction is to consider how anthropology approaches the social science task of comparison. Familiarizing readers with this engagement will, we hope, help in thinking about the contributions of the papers in this issue. The final section provides a brief introduction to each article, suggesting some of the ways they intersect with and illuminate themes we have raised here.

Anthropology and Development

Anthropological scholarship on development, while outside the main debates in comparative international development, is extensive. This section will identify and explain several themes and perspectives that distinguish anthropological approaches. These perspectives are not, of course, unique to anthropology, but in conjunction they are nonetheless distinctive. Broadly, we group our discussion into four domains: 1) development's effects on the ground; 2) development as power; 3) the development apparatus (donors, institutions and projects); and 4) development's relationship to modernization and modernity. For each domain we briefly explain

the primary arguments or debates and include a few representative – though by no means exhaustive – examples from the literature.

Development's Effects on the Ground

We begin with the way that anthropology has contributed to understanding the consequences of development policies, programs, and interventions in the communities and among the populations who are the ostensible beneficiaries. This is almost certainly the aspect of anthropology that is most widely recognized among those who are involved in planning, implementing, and evaluating development agendas. The idea that anthropology is particularly well suited to understanding the grassroots is a legacy of the discipline's history of community-based research in non-Western societies, including those in undergoing processes of development (for example, Leach 1954, Richards 1939).

At the core of much of this work is the notion, reinforced by the empirical evidence, that a mismatch between the cultural assumptions of those designing and implementing development agendas and the cultural realities of the intended beneficiaries produces development failures (Mitchell 2002; Mosse 2005; Lewis and Mosse 2006). While some strands of such scholarship suggest that better understanding of local realities could ensure more favorable development outcomes (Earle and Simonelli 2005), others suggest that the very endeavor is plagued by unexamined ethnocentrism and structural inequalities that doom development in ways that are irremediable through better understandings of local culture (Escobar 1995). This position, while embraced by many who study development's effects locally, will be more fully articulated and explored below in the sub-section on development as power.

One other instructive way to characterize research in anthropology focusing on the on-the-ground effects of development is with regard to the varying emphasis that is placed on

resistance. A focus on grassroots resistance is often integral to accounts that critique development policies and interventions for their incongruity with local realities and for their negative consequences. Sometimes such resistance is overt, such as collective mobilization against infrastructure construction projects like dams, pipelines, or urban development initiatives that clear slums (Farmer 1992; Rothman 2001; Watts 2007); or against programs perceived to impose foreign values or agendas, such as campaigns to stop female circumcision and mass vaccination drives to eradicate polio (Renne 2010). Perhaps more commonly, anthropologists' accounts of local resistance to development programs identify tacit examples of resistance, consistent with James Scott's concept of the weapons of the weak (1985). In such cases, local communities and populations often cannot overtly resist development interventions because of steep inequalities that would make protest too risky; instead they resort to subtle efforts to push against intrusions they do not want (Leonard 2010).

While a considerable body of anthropological research on development has highlighted the mismatch of development policies and practices to local priorities and cultural practices, ethnographic accounts of the everyday effects of development interventions have also focused on the ways in which local communities and targeted populations frequently appropriate the ideas and materials introduced by development programs for purposes other than those envisioned by the policymakers, donors, and implementers. Sometimes such re-appropriations seem to amount to forms of resistance; other times they look more like adaptations unconnected to resistance *per se*, but evidence, nonetheless, of the ways that local priorities, cultural norms, and agency manifest themselves even in situations where external development actors appear disproportionately powerful. For example, anthropological accounts have demonstrated how local behavior in response to development initiatives that outsiders might label as corruption

frequently serve other, more pro-social purposes when they are understood in their context (Blundo and Olivier de Sardan 2006; Smith 2007). Further, the literature is full of examples of how people targeted for various technological interventions – from new contraceptives to novel farming practices – frequently make use of these innovations in ways that are unforeseen (and sometimes unwelcome) on the part of the development actors that introduce them (Bledsoe et al. 1998; Richards 1996; McNeill 2009).

Some anthropologists have also noted, in response to our discipline's generally very critical stance vis-à-vis development, that many of the things that development promises – whether it is electricity, roads, formal education, and biomedical healthcare or greater prosperity and consumption – are, in fact, highly desired by vast numbers of people in the nominally developing world. Such accounts have warned against allowing concerns about the political and cultural effects of development to obscure the degree to which poor people want and deserve better lives (Ferguson 1999; Auyero 2000). In addition, scholars such as Akhil Gupta (1998) and others (Thornton 2005) have shown that the identity of underdeveloped has taken hold and become central in national debates and local subjectivities. These accounts do not necessarily disagree with the prevailing anthropological suspicions about development, but they do remind us that poverty and inequality are real problems that people in diverse cultural settings would like to change.

Development as Power

Much of anthropology's unease about development is driven by scholarship that suggests that despite its stated goals of improving life for the countries, communities, and peoples it targets, development programs frequently entrench the power of elites and the state. James Ferguson's *The Anti-Politics Machine* (1990) was an early and highly influential articulation of

this perspective, drawing on his study of an agricultural development project in rural Lesotho. Ferguson persuasively demonstrates that development solidifies and expands state power by depoliticizing social problems and processes, rendering them objects of development knowledge and intervention. Highlighting what many critical observers of development have since noted, Ferguson shows that even as development interventions fail in their own terms, those failures become justifications for further intervention, all of which have political effects well beyond the stated technical objectives. As Tania Murray Li put it, development has a parasitic relationship to its own shortcomings and failures (2007:1).

Ferguson, Li, and many other anthropologists who take a critical view of development draw heavily on the work of Michel Foucault, particularly in explicating the idea that development institutions generate their own form of discourse, which constructs its object of knowledge in particular ways. Arturo Escobar (1995) argues that development's discursive regime primarily benefits the developers (rich countries, donors, etc.) and suggests that development does more to create poverty (as a category, but then also as a human reality) than to alleviate it. The notion of development as a discourse with political consequences that belie its seemingly noble rhetoric is pervasive in anthropology, and many studies have sought to demonstrate how this unfolds in different contexts.

In Li's *The Will to Improve*, which is perhaps the most important and influential anthropological monograph about development since *The Anti-Politics Machine*, she takes up the way that development must be analyzed as an arena for the exercise of power, reminding us that the claim to expertise in bettering the lives of others is a claim to power (2007). Drawing on meticulous long-term fieldwork in Indonesia, Li embarks on the classical anthropological project of making the familiar strange, and the strange familiar. In her case the goal is to make the will to

improve (her synonym for the impetus to development) something we do not simply take for granted. Instead, she argues that development is a human endeavor that must be historicized, contextualized, and situated in relationship to the political work that it does. Building on Ferguson's idea of an anti-politics machine, she shows development's deeply political consequences, even as it seemingly render[s] technical (2007:123) the problems it aims to solve. Typical of anthropology's critique of development, Li explores – and finds problematic – the ways of thinking that enable the translation of messy conjunctures into linear narratives of problems, interventions, and beneficial results.

Li's work also tackles a thorny question central to understanding the conceptualization of development as power; namely, to what degree an intentional political project of asserting and maintaining authority and control lies behind the way that development discourses circulate and lie at the heart of the apparatus that deploys them. Li argues that development involves visible and non-visible exercises of power, drawing on Gramsci and Foucault, respectively, to illuminate each dimension. She admonishes that we need not find hidden agendas on the part of development institutions and actors in order to observe – and criticize – development's political consequences. Of course, the trope of bad things done in the name of good is timeless human story, but understanding it is made all the more complicated when good intentions are real and politics is played out in arenas seemingly rendered non-political.

The Development Apparatus

Anthropology's concern with development as power, combined with a broader move in the discipline to recognize the importance of studying institutions above the level of kinship and community (the classic arenas of anthropological research) has led to a fluorescence of ethnographic research examining the development apparatus itself. Anthropologists now

commonly study the full range of institutional actors that make up the global development system, from multilateral organizations, to donor and recipient-government agencies, to international and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Everything from the World Bank to community-based organizations created locally to press for indigenous people's rights have become the objects of anthropological inquiry (Goldman 2005; Dove 2006). More recently, anthropologists have turned their attention to the growing role of private companies in development initiatives, often under that guise of so-called corporate social responsibility (CSR). Anthropological accounts of CSR and private sector development efforts generally paint a highly critical picture (Watts 2005; Welker 2009; Leonard 2010).

Anthropology's turn to studying up (Nader 1969) has enabled our critical understanding of development to extend beyond seeing the mismatch between development policies and local priorities to examine the production of development discourses and practices as they are disseminated through a veritable industry of institutions and actors. Such accounts enrich both the theoretical analyses and ethnographic evidence necessary to situate development in its global and local contexts. The growing anthropological literature on development institutions is by now too large to summarize here, but it is instructive to briefly consider one important arena of inquiry in this area: the anthropology of development NGOs.

We pick this to exemplify anthropology's focus on the development apparatus for three reasons: 1) in recent decades NGOs have multiplied exponentially as an institutional mechanism to promote development; 2) NGOs are often touted as a solution to the mismatch between Western/donor aims and local priorities and realities because of their perceived capacity to bridge state and community boundaries and reach the grassroots; and 3) with anthropology's long-term experience studying the local, the discipline ought to be well placed to examine and assess the

effects of NGO-led development in the communities and among the populations it is meant to benefit.

The social sciences in general have documented the rise of development NGOs – what is often referred to as NGOization – and offered critical accounts of them in many settings around the world (Mercer 2002; Kamat 2004; Szeftel 2000; Watkins, Swidler, and Hannan 2012). Much of the literature has focused on NGOs’ relationship to the state and to systems of governance (Bratten 1989; Kasfir 1998; Swidler 2006). From some perspectives, NGOs provide services that the state is unable or unwilling to support, and, depending on the case (or the scholar’s point of view), this NGO work can either push the state to be more responsive to the people or provide the state continued leeway to perform ineffectively (Moyo 2009). In some instances, NGOs are seen as acting on behalf of government, solidifying its power; in others, NGOs are touted as challenging—or at least checking—state authority.

In the anthropological literature, attention has focused frequently on whether NGOs actually succeed in delivering the development benefits they promise (Bornstein 2005; Lewis and Mosse 2006; Igoe and Kelsall 2005). Very often the findings suggest they do not (Campbell 2003). Much has been learned by examining not just whether NGOs achieve their stated aims, but by also by attending to the effects they have beyond their ostensible purposes, in relation to institutional and organizational transformations (Elyachar 2005; Swidler 2006, 2009) and with regard to the lives of individuals working for or receiving assistance from NGOs (Bornstein 2005; Dahl 2014; Mosse 2011; Maes 2012; Peters 2013). This literature suggests that although NGOs are powerful actors that in some respects appear to create institutional homogeneity across diverse cultural settings, in other ways NGOs and the individual actors associated with them must constantly adapt to complex local realities (Smith 2003; Meyer 2010; Closser 2010).

Anthropological accounts of development NGOs illustrate both their role in the reproduction of existing inequality and power dynamics and the possibilities for local appropriation and resistance when development programs hit the ground.

Development and Modernization/Modernity

A final theme that characterizes anthropology's critical engagement with development is the preoccupation with the issue of modernity, and specifically the difference between modernity and modernization. It is important to briefly describe and explain this focus because it is also directly relevant to understanding anthropology's position vis-à-vis the study of population, which we will take up later in this essay. In a nutshell, anthropologists have been highly critical of narratives about development that tell what is often characterized as a modernization story. Anthropology's objections to the modernization narrative are that it is overly linear, Eurocentric, and teleological (Greenhlagh 1996). The modernization story assumes that development is the process by which countries called Third World will eventually become like Western industrialized societies, and that all societies sit somewhere along a single continuum in which they have moved farther or less far toward that goal.

To most anthropologists, this idea of development smacks of social evolutionism and resembles colonialist tropes in which Western societies positioned themselves as superior to the peoples whom they ruled, in a self-justifying narrative accompanying exploitation (Olivier de Sardan 2005). The term modernity as used in anthropology reflects a commitment (albeit sometimes contested) to cultural relativism – the idea that every society must be understood in its own terms and that there is no objective basis to judge any society as superior to another. The literature on modernity both acknowledges the degree to which people everywhere live in a globalized world that produces many widely shared experiences and aspirations, and at the same

time attends to the continuing power of culture and local context to shape the particular contours and meanings of being modern. Sometimes implicitly and sometimes explicitly, debates about what modernity is are also debates about what development is., because ideas and expectations about modernity are frequently interconnected with understandings of and aspirations regarding development. Anthropology has tended to handle questions about the extent to which desires for and experiences of being modern are global or local, universal or particular, by employing terms like multiple modernities or vernacular modernities, with the plural form signaling the diversity produced by culture and context (Eisenstadt 2000; Knauf 2002).

The idea of vernacular modernities has parallels in the study of development. A considerable body of anthropological scholarship emphasizes the importance of cultural difference in understanding development processes. While we agree that anthropology offers the comparative study of development a useful corrective to the tendency to underappreciate the importance of context, we also note that in anthropology's efforts to stand up for culture, it can sometimes overlook the extent to which the problem of development is about fundamental material inequalities. Anthropologists like Paul Farmer (1999) and James Ferguson (1990, 2006) remind us that a preoccupation with culture may obscure important structural issues. In response to the anthropological inclination to grant every society the status of modern, Ferguson writes: Anthropologists today are eager to say how modern Africa is. Many ordinary Africans might scratch their heads at such a claim (2006: 185). We would do well to remember that it is not only social scientists who can make comparisons; the ostensible beneficiaries of development are well aware of its uneven outcomes.

Population and Development

Classic demographic accounts tell a story of grand and worldwide transformation that parallels – and in some of its guises reproduces – the modernization trope. Understanding the importance of population processes in development, at least at the macro level, requires situating development within what is known in demography as the demographic transition. Scholars of population who study the relationship between demographic transition and development generally agree that the social and economic processes we widely recognize as development are mutually intertwined with profound changes in population dynamics (Dyson 2010). Scholarship on the relationship between demography and development works at trying to understand the broad causal mechanisms that appear to be similar across societies, while also examining the specificities of individual cases.

Briefly, demographic transition is an intertwining set of population-rooted social transformations that scholars argue unfold in fundamentally similar ways across a wide range of social and political settings, both responding to and producing the contexts and opportunities for development – whether one measures development as increasing life expectancy at birth, urbanization, economic growth, or higher levels of formal education. Reducing a complex set of processes to its basics, demographic transition is a cascading set of changes that begins with mortality decline. The decline in death rates spurs population growth in a period of time between lower death rates and declining fertility. Lower fertility rates are widely observed to follow (and some would argue inevitably follow) lower mortality. During the period of population growth – across the contexts where this has taken place – a number of things tend to happen that are closely related to economic growth and development. Population growth in rural areas spurs out-migration to cities among people seeking alternative opportunities to agricultural livelihoods constrained by population density. Rural-to urban migration sets in motion increasing

urbanization, which is a transformative process because it creates economies of scale, it enables (or requires) new kinds of economic arrangements and relations (facilitating capitalism, etc.), and it spurs innovation.

Significantly, along with migration and urbanization, population growth changes the age structure of populations, with the relative percentage of the population that is young becoming very high for a period of time before fertility decline. This youth bulge eventually results, temporarily, in a large working-age population, what has sometimes been called the demographic dividend (Bloom, Canning and Sevilla 2003). The idea of the demographic dividend is that societies in the midst of demographic transition have an opportunity to utilize the bulge in the working-age population to catalyze economic development, and evidence suggests that many societies have experienced major economic growth and transformation during the process (Dyson 2010). But whether societies benefit from the demographic dividend appears to depend on the right configuration of policies and institutions, as well as, perhaps, the structural opportunities available in the global economy (Lee and Mason 2006; Bloom et al. 2007).

In demographic transitions, fertility rates eventually decline and the population structure of post-demographic transition societies changes again, with the fraction of children now declining. Somewhat surprisingly to some demographers, many societies' fertility rates continued to fall well below the replacement level of 2.1 children per woman, creating new problems of low fertility, such that these societies (including, so far, much of Europe, Russia and segments of East Asia, but possibly many other places as well) will face problems replacing their labor force (Morgan 2003). Low fertility and its attendant labor force challenges intersect profoundly and sometimes explosively with development problems in countries still experiencing high fertility, as many people from the Global South attempt to migrate to the North

in search of better economic opportunities. The political and cultural tensions over migration in Northern countries are ironic from demographic and economic perspectives, given that low fertility countries desperately need the labor that international migrants offer.

A further related problem associated with the later stages of demographic transition is population aging, which is a direct consequence of the changing population age structure, as a consequence of previous fertility and mortality rates. This is an issue faced by nearly every society that has undergone demographic transition, and is most acute in places where fertility declined especially rapidly, such as much of East Asia. The reason we point out all of these macro-demographic trends is because they often tend to be overlooked by scholars of comparative international development, and also by anthropologists who either find such large-scale processes beyond the scope of our methodological toolkit or are repelled by the similarities of demographic transition narratives to a linear, teleological modernization story. We would argue, however, that scholars interested in development should be more aware of these larger population processes – setting them in context, pointing out the specificities that make each case different, and attending to their effects on people and communities, but mindful of the power of demographic trends.

Before presenting an overview of how anthropology has contributed to the study of population – work that the essays in this issue build on as they examine the intersection of population and development in diverse settings across a range of topics – it is worth explaining briefly that social changes associated with demographic transition unfold not only in broad macro-level arenas, but also in micro-level domains of human relations such as kinship, household composition and dynamics, marriage, generational ties, gender relations, the meaning of childhood, and much more. While it is beyond our scope here to catalogue, much less

explicate, all of the everyday arenas of sociality affected by population processes in general and demographic transitions in particular, much of social life as we know it is girded by the particular population dynamics underpinning it. These are all spheres in which anthropology is well equipped to gather evidence, provide analysis, and offer important conclusions. We turn now to a brief overview of anthropological demography's contributions to understanding these issues.

Anthropological Demography

Anthropology and demography both address fundamental questions about the dynamics of groups of people, and for over a century, there have been individual scholars who worked at the boundaries of the two disciplines. However, those boundary areas have never been densely populated, because of fundamental differences between the two fields in their objectives, methods, and intellectual frameworks. In this brief overview, we will consider two ways that anthropologists and demographers have collaborated:¹ first, around the importance of culture for explaining demographically relevant behavior and second, in the application of ethnographic methods to demographic topics. It is notable that both of these are essentially cases where ethnographic methods and theories have been imported into demography. By contrast, demographic methods and theories have had less impact on contemporary socio-cultural anthropology. Because of this non-symmetric interaction, we call this section anthropological demography rather than merely anthropology and demography.

Demographies of Culture

Demography is the study of population size, structure, and change, processes that are necessarily studied using quantitative methods at the aggregate level. Central to demographic

¹ We are focused here on the intersection of demography with socio-cultural anthropology. There is also an extensive history of interaction between biological anthropology and demography, around topics such as evolutionary life history theory and small-area estimation. However, those issues constitute a quite different set of conversations.

reasoning is the fact that changes in population size necessarily produce changes in its structure, and that population structure is highly systematic: for example, growing populations always have young age structures, and population growth rates are driven more by fertility rates than by mortality rates. We know these facts from models, and our study of them is model-centered (Keyfitz 1972). However, it is also critical to demography that population size, structure, and change are the consequence of only three processes—fertility, mortality, and migration—and all three of these processes are deeply embedded in social structure and culture. We can understand how fertility rates shape population age structure without knowing anything about culture. But we cannot understand *why* fertility rates are high or low without understanding culture. Wherever demographers aspire to do more than population accounting, they have to deal with culture.

Because culture so directly influences rates of fertility, mortality, and migration, demographers have thought about culture on and off for nearly a century, and when demographers have thought about culture, they have generally looked to anthropology for guidance. As anthropologists have had a range of conceptual models for culture—as grammar, text, system, or structure, for example—demographers have also thought about culture in a range of ways (Hammel 1990). Culture was already seen as intimately related to demographic rates and change by Maurice Halbwachs, a prominent student of Emile Durkheim, in his 1938 monograph *Morphologie Sociale*. In that book, Halbwachs argues that demographic facts are reflections of collective consciousness, that is, of shared mental representations derived from shared experiences of social meaning. Soon after, and in a very different intellectual context, the economist and demographer Frank Notestein developed the theory of demographic transition, discussed above, in which cultural and economic change jointly cause declines in mortality and fertility. While numerous anthropologists have argued that DTT is Eurocentric and even

teleological (see for example Handwerker 1986), Notestein's conception of demographic transition actually gives an important role to cultural change. He argues that fertility decline followed from the growing individualism and rising levels of popular aspiration developed in urban industrial living through which the individual came to depend less and less on the status of his family for his place among his fellows (1945:40). Notestein saw the changes in fertility caused by economic development to occur largely *through* cultural transformations, both ideational (values and tastes) and institutional (constitution of the family and household, assignment to social roles). That is, Notestein deployed a concept of cultural change very consistent with anthropological thinking of the day (see for example Wilson and Wilson 1945).

The 1950s saw a substantial increase in studies into the relationships between culture, institutions, and demographic outcomes as anthropologists, sociologists, and demographers worked together to make sense of population processes in poor countries. For the most part, scholars at this time treated mortality decline in a context of development as self-evident and of little social-theoretical interest, whereas they saw the relationship between development and fertility as much more complicated and interesting. Many of these authors made explicit links between the historical fertility transition in Europe and then-incipient fertility transitions in poor countries (for example, Davis and Blake 1956). Among the prototypical works of this period is Frank Lorimer's 1954 book *Culture and Human Fertility*, which argues that a core demographic process—fertility—is an integral part of social systems, intimately linked to institutions of kinship and family, land tenure and inheritance, religion, education, and cultural attitudes.

For Lorimer as for Davis and Blake, cultural explanations of demographic change are deeply institutional: the (cultural) structure of work, family, and political participation provide the context in which demographically relevant behavior takes place. This same view is seen

several decades later in the influential work of John Caldwell, who although trained as a demographer, often described his intellectual project as bringing insights from anthropology into demography. For Caldwell, culture is the unity of institutions and ideas that together determine what individuals will try to achieve, and what constraints they will face. He argued therefore that in societies of every type and stage of development, fertility behavior is rational, and fertility is high or low as a result of economic benefit but that [w]hether high or low fertility is economically rational is determined by social conditions (1976: 355). For Caldwell, the core contribution of anthropology to demography was to explain the social conditions within which people acted with demographic consequences—to make clear how and why different behaviors were indeed rational. Whereas Tania Li (2007) and many other contemporary anthropologists seek to make familiar development practices seem strange, Caldwell focused on the reverse—but also very anthropological—trope of making the strange seem familiar.

A quite different view of the relationship between demography and culture emerged out of the European Fertility Project under the guidance of Ansley Coale. Whereas Caldwell and others saw culture—and therefore anthropology—as explaining why the rational people in different contexts make different choices, Coale and his students have argued against the idea of a single, universal rationality. For Coale, demographically relevant behavior is sometimes subject to the calculus of conscious choice, in which the trade-off of costs and benefits makes sense, but not always (1973). While he still thought of demographic transition as a universal process, with a before and an after, Coale's rejection of the universality of western means-ends rationality is an important point of convergence between standard demography and the anthropological theory of his day. In explaining the timing of fertility declines in Europe, for example, Coale argued that adjacent provinces sharing the same language or ethnic origin were often alike in fertility even

though different in educational levels, infant mortality, and the proportions living in cities. At the same time, adjacent provinces that had different cultural background ... were not alike in fertility (Coale 1987: 21). In explaining this pattern, Coale and his students concluded that demographic change occurred through social interactions, facilitated by cultural similarity, and not as a result of individual rational actors responding to changed economic conditions. Development could only be understood through a framework of cultural difference; culture determined the contours of population change.

One of the most prominent of Coale's students is Susan Cotts Watkins. Her 1991 monograph *Provinces into Nations* shows that as fertility in Europe fell between the middle of the 19th century and the middle of the 20th, it also became far more similar within countries. She argues that although demographically-relevant behavior is always influenced by social norms shared through social communication, the mechanisms through which this social communication occurs have changed: in 1870, local gossip was the primary mechanism, whereas by 1960, newspapers and other national media dominated; as a result, the homogenizing effects of social communication are stronger today than in the past, and also correspond more with the borders of nations. For Watkins, culture is thus centrally about interaction, both as a source of new ideas or information, and also as an evaluative cloud of conversation (Hammel 1990:467) which influences individual action. As a result, we cannot think about culture only through institutions, nor can we think about it as an individual trait. Culture is therefore something that *occurs* rather than something that endures, and it occurs particularly in communication.

If Caldwell focused on institutions and Watkins on communication, a third group of anthropological demographers has focused more on the *content* of culture, particularly as it is held in the mind: schemas, attitudes, values, and beliefs. This tradition begins with Ryder and

Westoff (1971), and is well-represented by Ron Lesthaeghe, who argues, for example, that changes in values and ideas were largely responsible for the European fertility decline, and that these changes were largely autonomous of socioeconomic change (1983:412), arising instead from the spread of secular individualism from the sphere of politics to the family. Fertility fell because people came to pursue personal goals devoid of reference to a cohesive and overarching religious or philosophical construct (ibid:415) after the social regulation of fertility gave way to the principle of individual freedom of choice (ibid:411). Similarly, Thornton's conception of Developmental Idealism stresses how a range of behaviors from hand-washing to contraceptive use have changed in response to the spread and acceptance of western values (2001). He argues that even though the developmental paradigm in which small families both cause and result from economic development is demonstrably false, it is nonetheless widely accepted in poor countries, and that this belief itself drives changes in demographic behavior and subsequently in demographic outcomes. This point—that even wrong ideas about development can be massively consequential if they are widely believed—has relevance for many domains beyond anthropological demography.

The culture concept is central to anthropological demography; yet, few of the scholars mentioned thus far in this section have been anthropologists. Indeed, much of the last half-century, demographers have been more eager to learn anthropological ideas than the reverse, and most of the interchange between demographers and anthropologists has occurred as people have sought to apply anthropological methods or theories to demographic questions. It was not until the 1990s that a considerable number of anthropologists began to engage more directly with demography, and thereby began to ask really different kinds of questions (for example, see Basu and Aaby 1998; Bledsoe and Pison 1994; Greenhalgh 1995; Kertzer and Fricke 1997;

Lesthaeghe 1989), not only about the kinds of social systems that structure demographically-relevant behavior, but also about the role of demography itself in the production of demographic facts. Whereas anthropological demography before the 1990s had mainly focused on explaining why demographic rates were what they were, this new generation of scholars focused on agency and power, attending to the dual production of demographic rates and the discourses about those rates.

This perspective is perhaps best accomplished in Bledsoe's 2002 monograph *Contingent Lives: Fertility, Time, and Aging in West Africa*. Here Bledsoe argues that high fertility in rural Gambia is an achievement for which women struggle and strategize, timing pregnancies in relation to their own bodily resources and social—particularly marital—circumstances in order to bear the full complement of children with which God endowed them. For Bledsoe, pretransition fertility is therefore not outside the calculus of conscious choice, but its calculus is different than that assumed in most demographic texts, and therefore is hard to recognize. At the same time, *Contingent Lives* is about demography and demographers: about who is authorized to write about African fertility, and on what grounds. In the work of demographic anthropologists in the 1990s, culture became construed as a contested set of symbolic resources, constantly being reconfigured to suit new situations as people struggle to lead the lives they want, with demographers as one set of social actors to be considered among others.

Over the past 10 to 15 years, the concept of culture has become more central in the demographic literature. Anthropologists, however, are again nearly absent from these conversations. Demographers want to know about culture in order to better model rates of fertility, mortality, and migration. But few contemporary anthropologists are interested in that project, wanting instead to understand to understand politics, power, and ethics. In these

frameworks, population dynamics are not interesting, but the production of knowledge about population dynamics is. The historian Michel Foucault argued that one of the most important forms of contemporary power is biopower, which takes the population, rather than the individual body or individual life, as an object of political interest and intervention (Foucault 2012a, 2012b). In this way, demography becomes a discipline that is both important and necessarily tainted. Differential birth and death rates by group are often the basis of policy interventions; projections of differential population growth rates may be cause for more extreme ones. If mechanisms of power produce knowledge, which then reinforces the exercise of power, then demography as a discipline is closely tied to biopower. In this intellectual context, it is very difficult for a young anthropologist to engage with demography except to treat it as an object of study, or even an object of critique.

On the other hand, many in the present generation of younger demographers agree that cultural forces and factors shape demographic rates, and have been eager to learn anthropological approaches. Trinitapoli and Weinreb's (2012) *Religion and AIDS in Africa*, for example, is a profoundly cultural book, which argues that to understand demographic outcomes we need to take religious practices and communities seriously, rather than assuming behavior on the basis of stated ideology, or studying only either individual-level behaviors or national differences. Examining how systems of meaning, practices, and resources are organized between individual, across communities and nations, Trinitapoli and Weinreb have culture in the center of their analysis. Yet, neither Trinitapoli nor Weinreb is an anthropologist, nor are many of the other anthropological demographers who currently publish in the main demography journals (for example, Agadjanian 2001; Bernardi 2003; Bernardi and Hutter 2007; Hayford and Trinitapoli 2011; Hayford and Morgan 2008; Yeatman and Trinitapoli 2008). As many anthropologists have

turned away from studying culture to studying power and ethics, demographers have stepped into the breach.

Qualitative Methods

So we saw in the previous section that the interaction of demography and anthropology regarding theory has been asymmetric, with demography drawing more from anthropology than the reverse. The same holds in terms of methods. Whereas very few anthropologists today would argue for the wider use of demographic methods, the anthropological field methods are highly regarded in demography. Classical demographic methods focus on the quantitative analysis of aggregate data: the life table, decomposition, and population projection serve as classic examples. Demography traditionally lacked field methods, as the process of producing data was considered the task of administrative units or, more recently, survey research teams, not of demographers. Anthropological methods, by contrast, are largely focused on field methods, with ethnography as the centerpiece. Ethnography is a stance toward research and data. It begins with the belief that the researcher does not know the answers, or sometimes even the right questions, before going to the field. Anyone who has ever run a survey in which one or more questions produced non-sensical answers has acquired this intuition. As a result of this stance, the ethnographer necessarily becomes subordinate to the habits and rhythms and practices of the people she is trying to understand. Her own discomfort and confusion are part of the method, as they reveal the limits of the ethnographer's understanding, and point to arenas where new discoveries are possible. Along with the practice of submitting to the field comes a commitment to getting data from everywhere: a great ethnography uses many different kinds of data as clues to piece together the material and symbolic systems of interest. Survey data, interviews, clippings from newspapers, observations at rituals, bus schedules, casual conversations while

waiting for the bus, collections of letters, time diaries, field experiments, card-sort exercises, photographs: all these and more have their place in ethnography. The point is to assemble as wide a range of sources as possible, because the systems of meaning and structures of social organization that you want to understand are themselves complex and multiply interrelated. A single source can only ever reveal part of the story. In that sense, all ethnography is mixed methods research; it is no more similar to qualitative interviews or focus groups than it is to a thoughtful reading of a survey.

Few demographers today actually do ethnography, but many have taken on at least some of the methods that comprise it. In-depth interviews and the (mostly quantitative) analysis of cultural texts are no longer rare in demographic journals. Many more demographers now go to the field to at least observe the data being collected, and a large fraction of young demographers will collect at least some of their data themselves. In this way, anthropological methods have had a substantial impact on demographic practice, even if anthropologists are not, for the most part, doing the work themselves. The centrality of qualitative work in anthropological demography raises several important issues, particularly concerning comparison and the role of culture. Most demography manages comparison through the reduction to number: total fertility rates and GDP per capita are universally comparable because they are always in the same units. For anthropological demography, however, comparison becomes an important conceptual problem.

Comparison in Anthropology

In placing anthropology – and the articles in this issue – within the wider interdisciplinary study of comparative international development, it is instructive to explain briefly anthropology's engagement with comparison as scholarly objective. In a previous publication, one of us co-authored a chapter about comparison in anthropology (Hirsch et al. 2009). Summarizing what we

said there provides useful background for readers not steeped in the history of the discipline. Anthropology was founded with comparison as its *raison d'être*. Much early anthropology, therefore, consisted of comparing societies according to particular traits – type of marriage, level of technology, political system, etc. – and categorizing them into stages along a unilineal and progressive path towards greater complexity. From the very outset, however, the project of comparison was considered problematic for its evolutionary assumptions.

In the chapter about comparison in Hirsch et al. (2009), from which we draw here, we identified four problems that have plagued comparison in anthropology (which are arguably also problems for disciplines less critical of comparative methods): *the problem of place*—how to demarcate different socio-geographic units of comparison; *the problem of analytical categories*—how to define the issue or topic being compared; *the problem of culture*—the ways in which the profound shifts in how culture is theorized initially made culture seem too integrated, and subsequently too historically embedded and internally contested, for comparison to be legitimate; and *the problem of globalization*—the ways in which the movement of people and ideas have made the project of comparison seem like the wrong methodology for the wrong questions.

The Problem of Place

For anthropologists interested in comparison, the question of how to demarcate comparable socio-geographical units is problematic. The socio-geographic units compared can be seen at best as somewhat arbitrary—were boundaries to be decided on the basis of environment, on claims of descent and autochthony, or on linguistic criteria?—and not easily considered commensurate, and at worst as not at all arbitrary, in that often they have been imposed through coercion and are based on the negotiations between, and expediencies of, colonial powers.

As Fredrik Barth has repeatedly pointed out: 1) important socio-cultural processes often take place at or across boundaries, and thus that treating places as autonomous units—whether they are regional neighbors or oceans apart—may blind the researcher to the most important dynamics taking place; and 2) it is entirely possible that the most important mechanisms generating variation may operate across societal boundaries, and thus are not definitive of specific cultures or societies (Bowen and Peterson 1999:13; Barth 1987, 1999).

The Problem of Analytical Categories

Analogous to the problems of how to demarcate place, and whether this is an intellectually valid or productive undertaking, is the concern that the analytical terms used to describe aspects of society are not necessarily valid as overarching categories or independent variables for making cross-cultural comparisons. For example, anthropologists may describe two societies as polygynous—and thus they may be coded as such in a comparative analysis—but that does not necessarily mean that polygyny looks the same in these two societies. In one society, wives may live together, and in the other, wives may have separate houses. In one society, the husband may be having sexual relations with his wives concurrently, while in the other, a man may cease having sex with his first wife upon marrying his second wife. In one society, the co-wives may have roughly equivalent social status, while in the other, they may have quite hierarchical relationships. Depending on the questions that are being asked in a comparative study, these differences will be profoundly significant, so that using polygynous societies as an independent variable and comparing it with monogamous societies will lead to spurious conclusions. Many such problems plague the use of analytical categories in comparison.

The Problem of Culture

Skepticism about whether a cultural trait in one society is, in fact, similar (or similar enough for any meaningful comparison) to the same cultural trait in another society is due not only to the empirical fact that polygyny, for example, is variable from one place to another. These doubts also stem from profound shifts over the last 50 years in the way that socio-cultural anthropologists conceptualize culture. In anthropology context is everything, and to de-contextualize and isolate one particular cultural trait for the purposes of comparison with another society is potentially to strip it of its true meaning—that is, the meaning that it had for the members of that society and that it had in relation to other dimensions of that society.

The idea that broader context is the key to understanding any particular dimension of society remains a – perhaps *the* – cornerstone of the discipline. However, the idea that culture is a highly integrated whole lost traction as the discipline yet again re-theorized what culture means. Particularly relevant to the project of comparison were the two related critiques that the holistic conceptualization of culture overemphasized social consensus and that it was ahistorical. Treating cultures as holistic can obfuscate the fact that culture is often an object of struggle. At the very least, then, comparison *between* societies also requires the comparison of differently positioned groups *within* societies.

Regarding the second critique about the ahistorical assumptions of the comparative project, Appadurai notes that the failure to do more complex historical comparison has led to spurious representations of many societies: It is now increasingly clear that in many instances where anthropologists believed they were observing and analyzing pristine or historically deep systems, they were in fact viewing products of recent trans-regional interactions (1988:38-39).

The Problem of Globalization

This leads directly to the final issue that has problematized comparison: globalization. With globalization the problem that socio-geographic units held up for comparison are potentially historically connected in some way and thus not independent variables has become the way of the world. Many scholars would say that this is actually not a new problem and that societies the world over have long been connected in ways that earlier anthropologists simply chose not to see. However, the intensification and highly visible global reach of these processes has raised questions about what topics anthropologists should choose to study and how they should go about researching them.

We raise these concerns that anthropologists generally share about comparison not to dismiss comparison as a scholarly project, but rather to suggest that the study of comparative international development would benefit from being mindful of these problems. As we stated early on, we do not see the debates and concerns about such issues as the privileged purview of anthropology. Indeed, we recognize that many scholars in other disciplines confront and address them too, more or less. In anthropology, our disciplinary traditions often push against overtly comparative studies and conclusions. Indeed, even in the articles assembled here comparison is more often implicit than explicit. Yet we believe that they have much to offer scholars tackling similar questions in other contexts.

Overview of the Articles

Although we did not direct the authors to address specific themes or topics, these papers are densely interrelated around three central themes, which each appear in the foreground of a couple of papers and the background of several others. The first theme concerns the complexity and partial internal contradiction of contemporary moral economies. Older work in demographic anthropology showed that when western development comes to non-western contexts, the

mismatches of meaning can be severe. These papers, however, go further, showing a more nuanced picture of non-western moral economies themselves. This is taken up especially by Bianca Dahl and Kenneth Maes et al. The second theme here is production of social reality through demographic classification. Nell Gabiam and Katherine Mason, in particular, draw attention to the how social categories are made and enforced, and to what effect. Categorization relates closely to governance and citizenship. Several decades of work in anthropology have made this point, but these papers push beyond what is known to apply this insight to demography and development. The final theme concerns the production of knowledge itself. How can we know about the social world in developing contexts? And in particular, how can demography and anthropology contribute to knowledge production? This theme is only explicitly developed in the paper by Lindsey Reynolds, although it occupies much of the background—and many of the footnotes!—in all of the other papers. The next paragraphs outline the core points in each paper, connecting them by central theme.

Bianca Dahl's engaging case study of one NGO project in Botswana builds on the anthropological tradition of demonstrating the consequences of partial mismatches between local systems of meaning and those of the development workers who try to help them. In the case Dahl analyzes, an NGO sought to protect girls from the sexual advances of older, wealthier, and potentially HIV-positive men by providing them with not only food and clothing, but also the luxuries that these partners often offer. The recipients of these NGO gifts, however, still wanted to have—and did have—sexual relationships with these same kinds of men, because the relationships were multifaceted, not only transactional. What is more, access to coveted cell phones, fashionable clothes, and so on transformed the girls' relationships with their families and care-givers, as moral authority over the girls partially shifted to the NGO itself. At a first reading,

this case echoes the ethnographic intuition that too much development work goes awry because it is culturally underinformed. But Dahl's point is also deeper. It is not only that a cultural misunderstanding between NGO workers and Batswana recipients of aid produced unintended consequences here, but also that these Batswana girls are acting in a context in which multiple, partially conflicting *local* moral economies are in play. Through her close fieldwork, Dahl is able to see, and therefore to make visible to readers, the complex webs of relationships, obligations, and hopes that motivate the actions of these wayward girls.

The complexity and partial contradictions inherent in local systems of meaning, ethics, and power are also shown in the paper by Kenneth Maes and his colleagues. They analyze the recent political history of community health care provision in Ethiopia. In 2001, the Ethiopian government reversed its previous policy of paying all rural health extension workers, creating an all-volunteer Women's Development Army to work alongside the paid community health workers. The motivations for this move, as Maes et al. show, was only partially cost saving. It also echoes with a strong ethos of self-help and community autonomy, which Maes et al. trace to the guerrilla resistance movement waged by current Ethiopian government leaders against the previous military regime. Using data from interviews and the close reading of government and NGO documents, Maes et al. show how these discourses of women's empowerment and autonomy can have anti-empowerment consequences. They argue that the idea of volunteer work as 'empowering' to women rests partly on the assumption that work outside the home—whether or not it is paid—makes women's lives better, but in Ethiopia, women who command more power within the household are less likely to work outside. Here, a *homegrown* discourse of women and national development nonetheless mischaracterizes the relationships between

gender, power, and work. It is not only foreign NGOs who produce development projects with ambivalent or even counterproductive outcomes.

Nell Gabiam contrasts how some Palestinians living in France understand statelessness with the formal, and highly consequential, classification of statelessness used by the United Nations High Commission on Refugees. Whereas for the UN, the problem of statelessness will be solved by the legitimacy of statehood and state recognition, many of Gabiam's interlocutors see states themselves as the problem. In a series of compelling interview quotes, juxtaposed against the definitions formalized by the UNHCR, Gabiam shows how demographic classification can produce problems as it solves others. If identity documents, and with them, legal identity itself, must come from the State, statelessness becomes a more multifaceted problem. The case of Palestinians is instructive. In Gabiam's own words: neither statehood nor state citizenship will guarantee their access to, and mobility across the places that are meaningful to them... or enable them to express the full range identities through which they understand themselves. Classification is an important form of power, and one that intersects with others in sometimes-unforeseen ways.

This duality of classification is elegantly explored by Katherine Mason, in her discussion of the way that Chinese epidemiologists racialize pathogens, considering viruses to be more infectious to those in the racial category within which the virus originally circulates. Thus, H1N1 was not considered a threat in China, because it had emerged in North America, among whites. In this joint classification of persons and things, local racial identity is seen as protective against foreign threats, and susceptibility becomes evidence of blended or imperfect identity. Indeed, Mason argues that mixed people—such as those who have lived for many years among people of another race—are seen by Chinese epidemiologists as the primary vectors through which viruses

can move from one population to another. Mason's deft handling of this challenging material shows us how classificatory projects matter not only in the direct political domain, but also beyond it, where science, politics, and a shared sense of belonging merge.

The final theme to which we draw attention is epistemological: what can we know and how can we know it? These scholars are all working in between different disciplinary traditions, with anthropology, development, and demography as the most prominent. Exploring how each of those contributes to our understanding of the social world is therefore not idle reflection, but an important part of advancing social science.

Lindsey Reynolds' paper goes the furthest down this path, directly contrasting what we can know about families and individuals in KwaZulu Natal from ethnographic and demographic data. She is an ethnographer who has collaborated for several years with scholars at a Demographic Surveillance Site (DSS). A DSS collects detailed, longitudinal demographic data about a complete population living within a specific geographic boundary. It provides demographic data in contexts where standard sources, such as vital registers, are too weakly developed to produce reliable estimates. DSS data also make feasible kinds of longitudinal analysis that had previously been almost impossible. Despite their many virtues, Demographic Surveillance Sites are still focused on estimating demographic parameters, leaving many ethnographic questions unasked. In contrasting the two sources of knowledge, Reynolds' point is not to decide which is better, but rather to explore what each process of knowledge production reveals about the other, and how they can jointly inform our understanding of the social world. Her conclusion—that the demographic and ethnographic viewpoints are incommensurable and yet both essential to contemporary social experiences of development—serves well as a conclusion for the volume as a whole.

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